

***Promising Young Woman's* Cassie Thomas is a Misunderstood Hero**

By Micaela Udell

SPOILERS

Not all heroes wear capes. In *Promising Young Woman*, Cassie Thomas (Carey Mulligan) is a misunderstood hero who fights crime in a modern day society. In the film, Cassie would go to clubs and bars each week, pretending to be under the influence to see if men would come up to her and ask her if she needed a ride home. While in reality, she was completely sober and acting, every one of the “nice guys” that asked her if she needed a ride home always took her back to their apartment and took advantage of her. She never gives consent or says “yes” to their offers, because she is pretending to be very drunk, but she goes along with it to get to their houses. Right before the men succeed in the assault, she snaps out of her drunken character and tells them to stop. She frightens these men to make sure they never take advantage of another woman again.

Throughout the movie, other characters would call Cassie “crazy” or “a psycho,” but I believe she was a realistic, modern hero. Even heroes like Wonder Woman and Batman kill to fight crime to protect innocent civilians. Cassie saves innocent women from being taken advantage of by men. Even though the film takes a dark turn with a murderous ending, I believe Cassie fighting back against cruelty makes her a hero.

Cassie is in search of revenge against Al Monroe (Chris Lowell), a man that raped her best friend Nina when they were in medical school together, causing her and Nina to drop out, who were in the top of their class, and eventually, Nina to take her own life. It is understood that the superheroes’ goals are to murder the villain in order to save the world. Cassie mimics this by trying to get revenge on Al Monroe, making her similar to a said fictional hero.

The title of the film *Promising Young Woman* has more than just one meaning to me. It does indicate that even promising young women like students in medical school can experience sexual assaults, and it can alter the course of their lives. However, I believe it also means Cassie is making a promise to other young women, to try and stop the “nice guys” from assaulting innocent women.

Revenge is a prevalent theme of this movie. Throughout the film, Cassie tried to get revenge on a woman from medical school who did not believe Nina, the dean of their medical school, Al Monroe’s lawyer and Al Monroe himself. Cassie got brunch with Madison (Alison Brie), the woman who disagreed with Nina’s rape allegations. Cassie hired a man to stage a fake assault, by putting her into a hotel bed, making her think she was raped. This seemingly malicious action was done so Madison would feel how Nina felt, without actually suffering through a real assault. She gave Madison a taste of the fear, violation and pain that comes with being taken advantage of.

Dean Walker (Connie Britton) didn't even remember Nina's story, due to the number of sexual assault and rape cases she claimed to get. She states how she always wanted to give the men accused "the benefit of the doubt." Cassie teaches her a lesson by tricking Dean Walker's daughter into giving Cassie her cell phone and telling Dean Walker that she is in the room where Nina was raped, making her fear that she would be raped, too.

Al Monroe's lawyer displayed his regret by crying to Cassie for bullying Nina to drop the case, so Cassie does not get revenge on him. He later helps catch Al for killing Cassie. Lastly, Cassie tries to stab Al Monroe to get back at him, but she ends up being murdered herself.

The powerful subplot within this film involves Cassie's love interest, Ryan Cooper (Bo Burnham). Coop goes to the coffee shop that Cassie works at and he confesses he had feelings for her when they went to medical school together. The audience starts to love Ryan and finds him to be a "nice guy" for Cassie. However, she later finds out his involvement in Nina's sexual assault. Cassie saw a video of the assault, and Ryan was in the background of it. He was watching it occur, as a bystander. When she confronts him about it, she goes on a downward spiral. He says he was sorry but he "didn't do anything." However, witnessing something as severe as a sexual assault makes you partially at fault for not helping.

The film's overarching message about sexual assault allegations is clear. People in society, even other women, often choose to believe the man. This allows men like Al to walk away with clean hands more often than we might think. In this case, Al still graduates from medical school, and even gets engaged. While Cassie was hungry for justice for Nina, Al does not get caught for any of the crimes he commits.

Cassie plays the role of a misunderstood hero in this film, as she tries to protect young women everywhere from frightening men willing to take advantage of them. Although she does end up being murdered by Al Monroe, the ending takes a huge twist. She succeeds in getting revenge on those involved in the rape of her best friend, by having the police lock up Al Monroe and Joe. However, Cassie is subsequently murdered. While the audience is initially stunned by her death, she still manages to successfully get justice for herself, and Nina.